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The making of an American

ONLY ONE YEAR. By Svetlana Alliluyeva. Translated by Paul Chavchavadze. Harper & Row. 444 pp. $7.95.

By Peter Jacobsohn

Svetlana Alliluyeva, Joseph Stalin's daughter, is without doubt the most important defector in the history of the Soviet Union, and hence the United States' greatest cold war trophy. Although she herself saw her defection to America as a leap to freedom, Mme. Alliluyeva will in fact never likely be anywhere near so free as she may have supposed. Apart from personal attributes, she has become — *is* — a political symbol, a figure whose every utterance, whose every deed, reverberates with world-wide political significance. In this sense, even though she can now write and say what she thinks, go almost anywhere she pleases, see whom she wishes, she remains a prisoner, not of any government, but of the cold war itself. Since she is from all appearances a lady of a certain winning robustness with a gift for enjoying life, the burden of her position is sad.

The Soviet Government, it will be recalled, reacted with enormous petulance to the publication of Mme. Alliluyeva's first book, *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, the family chronicle she wrote in Moscow in 1963, and published in the West in 1967. If that book resulted in Soviet petulance, *Only One Year* should bring on apoplexy. The theme of the earlier book was that her father had been a tragic misfortune for his country and his family. In her new book, an account of her last years in Russia with flashbacks to her youth, her escape, and her first year in America, this same theme is repeated — only this time round fortissimo. Whereas the portrait Mme. Alliluyeva drew of her father in *Twenty Letters* was a muted charcoal, shaded in with complexity, this newer version is a hard-edge picture of straight black and very little white. The Stalin of *Only One Year* is a hard-headed peasant whose sole aim in life is to claw his way to supreme power and to maintain it. Any psychological excuse — that he may have been a psychotic personality, or suffered from persecution mania — is now dismissed out of hand.

Mme. Alliluyeva's newly found clarity on the subject of her father may well be the result of the contacts she has made in exile. A more likely explanation, however, is that when the pro-Stalin reaction set in in Russia after the relatively liberal Khrushchev years, Mme. Alliluyeva finally came to realize that it was her father who was responsible for the rise to power today of the "semi-lower-middle-class" *apparatchiki*, the Brezhnevs, Kosygins and Suslovs, whom she holds in the staunchest contempt. In her view it is this group who in its greed for power has irredeemably subverted the Russian Revolution, which was largely made by idealistic intellectuals.

Safe from Soviet retaliation, she is now in a stronger position to fill in many of the details of her life left out of *Twenty Letters to a Friend*. After Stalin's death she ceased to be anything but "government property," with a pension and an apartment, agreeable and roomy by Soviet standards, which she shared with her children. She did not completely break her ties with the old guard — Molotov, Mikoyan and others — but her friends now were mostly intellectuals, among them colleagues from the Institute of World Literature, where she worked. Some of the most interesting portions of *Only One Year* have to do with her friend and colleague at the Institute, Andrei Sinyavsky, the writer, now imprisoned, whose work suggests that life in the Soviet Union can only be dealt with surrealistically. At the Institute, those who refused to sign a letter to the *Literary Gazette* approving Sinyavsky's prison sentence were even more fiercely attacked than those who had originally protested it. Not long afterwards, Mme. Alliluyeva, a vociferous protester, resigned her position.

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A decisive turn in her life came when she met Brajesh Singh, an Indian Communist of the old, idealistic persuasion. They were patients together in a hospital reserved for the elite of Moscow and foreign Communists. Though Singh was considerably older than herself, she fell in love with him, perhaps because he was so very much the opposite of her father. She was not allowed to marry him — a point of consequence, because marriage to a Russian citizen would have ensured more effective protection of Singh's health — and when he had to leave for India, she was able to get his return visa approved only by appealing to Mikoyan.

Singh finally died in Moscow, and Mme. Alliluyeva, who had become increasingly unhappy in Russia once Khrushchev was replaced by the rule of the unreconstructed *apparatchiki*, applied to Brezhnev and Kosygin personally for permission to travel to India to visit Singh's ancestral village and scatter his ashes in the Ganges. Kosygin and Brezhnev, who cannot have been unaware of Mme. Alliluyeva's temperament and determination, nonetheless at once granted her request. During her visit to India, her resolve to leave the U.S.S.R. stiffened. She decided to go to the United States after the Indian Government made it clear that it would not allow her prolonged stay to "be turned into a conflict between India and the U.S.S.R." — a decision which she found surprising.

Mme. Alliluyeva's account of her request for asylum to the U.S. Embassy and her subsequent history until her arrival in this country tallies with the reports published *ad infinitum* at the time, though she emerges as an even more quick-witted and plucky figure than press accounts had originally led one to believe. But one of the crucial questions that remains unanswered is why she insisted on coming to the U.S. In Switzerland, George Kennan, acting as emissary of the U.S. Government, asked her whether she would not prefer to live in England or France. She said she would not. There are, as she rightly remarks, many similarities between Russia and the U.S. and between American and Rus-

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